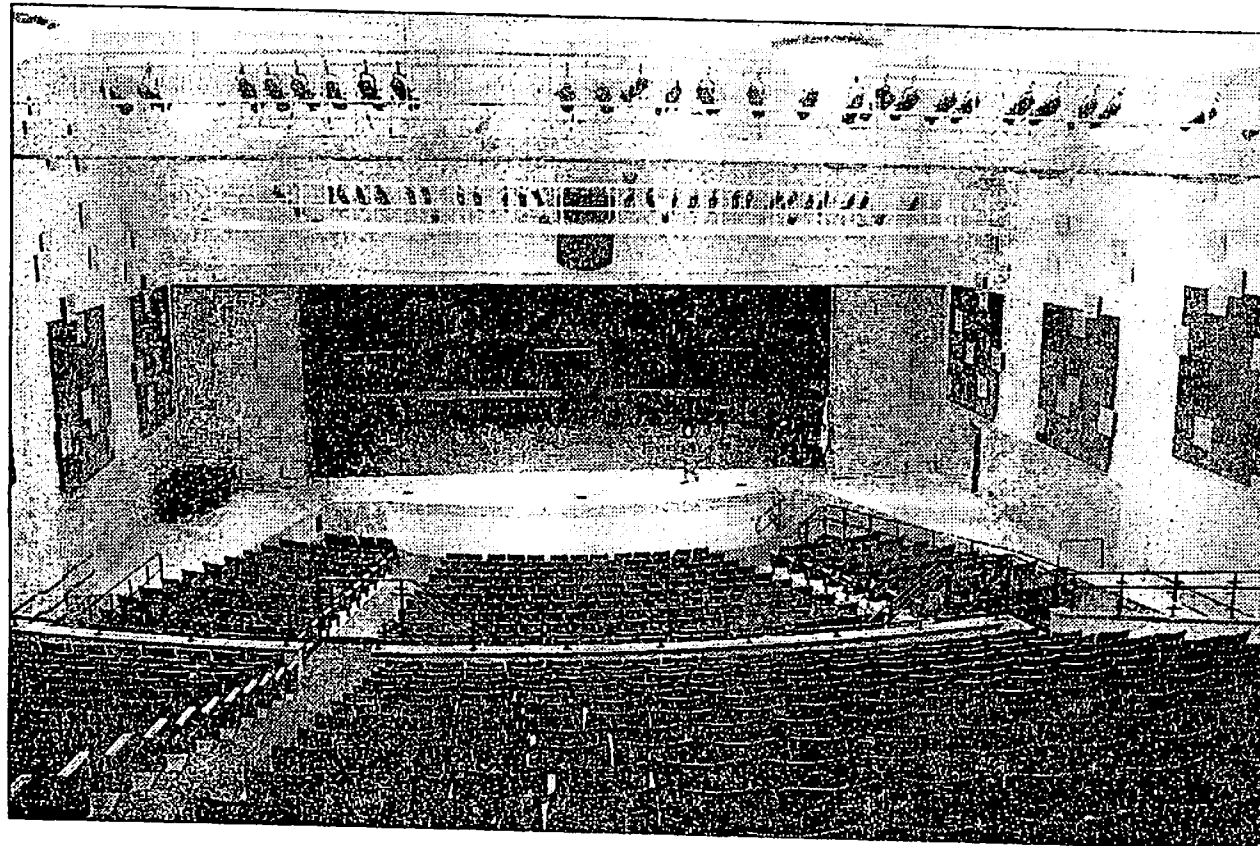


THE STAGE IS THE STAR



■ The Duxbury Performing Arts Center at Alden Elementary School, which opened in June, has rehearsal rooms, professional light and sound systems and stadium seating for about 1,000.

GREG DERR photos/The Patriot Ledger

CURTAIN RISES ON DUXBURY THEATER



■ Tony Kelso, manager of the performing arts center, said the goal for the center is to be self-sustaining.

New \$8 million auditorium is much more than a place for school plays

By KAREN GOULART

The Patriot Ledger

DUXBURY

Think elementary school auditorium, and certain images come to mind. A little wooden stage with an out-of-fashion orange curtain, a small, clunky piano on one side, an American flag on the other. All viewed from the comfort of a folding chair.

That old picture of a school assembly space is just the opposite of the bright, cavernous Duxbury Performing Arts Center at Alden Elementary School.

"It's not an elementary school auditorium in anything other than legal terms," said Richard Miller, drama coordinator for Duxbury High School, which will hold its February theater production there.

"It's a wonderful space," Miller said. "We love it."

School officials hope that all of Duxbury, and its neighboring towns, will love it, too. It is envisioned not

It is envisioned not just as a place for students to assemble, but as a hub of cultural activity for the area.

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Curtain rises on Duxbury theater

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just as a place for students to assemble, but as a hub of cultural activity for the area.

The center, which opened in June, boasts two stories, rehearsal rooms, professional light and sound systems, stadium seating and a nice, neutral dark blue curtain on its vast stage.

If you're standing on that stage, looking out at the audience, the upholstered green seats seem to stretch back for miles to the doors of the upper lobby. There are nearly 1,000 of them.

The rehearsal spaces, accessible from the backstage area, accommodate music and choral groups from Alden and the middle school, freeing former music classrooms for academic use.

The behind-the-scenes area also includes spacious dressing rooms with banks of lighted mirrors – enough to make a kid feel like a star and to keep a star happy – and a scenery shop.

In the lower lobby there is space for a box office and a new cafeteria that can double as a reception area.

The center was built as part of a \$39.4 million package of school renovations to Alden and Chandler elementary schools.

It was originally planned as a larger, three-story structure, with a \$9.8 million price tag. It was scaled down by a story, about 200 seats and \$1.8 million to make it more palatable to voters.

To receive state funding, the

Alden renovations needed to include an auditorium. Its primary function is to serve the students of Alden, the adjacent Duxbury Middle School and Duxbury High School, a short walk across the street.

The school committee and administrators saw this as an opportunity to create something that could be used by the schools and the community at large.

The renovations were finished in September 2003, but the performing arts center lagged behind by almost a year.

According to Tony Kelso, who became the center's manager in October, the building has already played host to several educational and cultural programs for students. Instead of presenting a program for one grade at a time, several grades can enjoy it at once.

He said one goal for the center is to be self-sustaining. This can best be accomplished by bringing in some shows that appeal to kids, their families and the community as a whole.

For these shows, money can be raised from tickets and from rental fees. Outside groups pay for the space, equipment and labor.

Their first major production was staged last month: "Beatlemania LIVE!" a Fab Four tribute show that drew about 400 people.

Kelso suspects the next show will do just as well, if not better: a traveling production of "The Nutcracker" set for Dec. 22-24 and 26.

Kelso is in conversations with

the Plymouth Philharmonic and would love to bring in a traveling group from the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. High-profile speakers and film nights are other possibilities.

Kelso said these types of shows will also give residents who don't have children or whose children are out of school a chance to enjoy the facility.

"They haven't had an opportunity to come in here," Kelso said. "We want to draw them in and make them feel good about what kind of place this is."

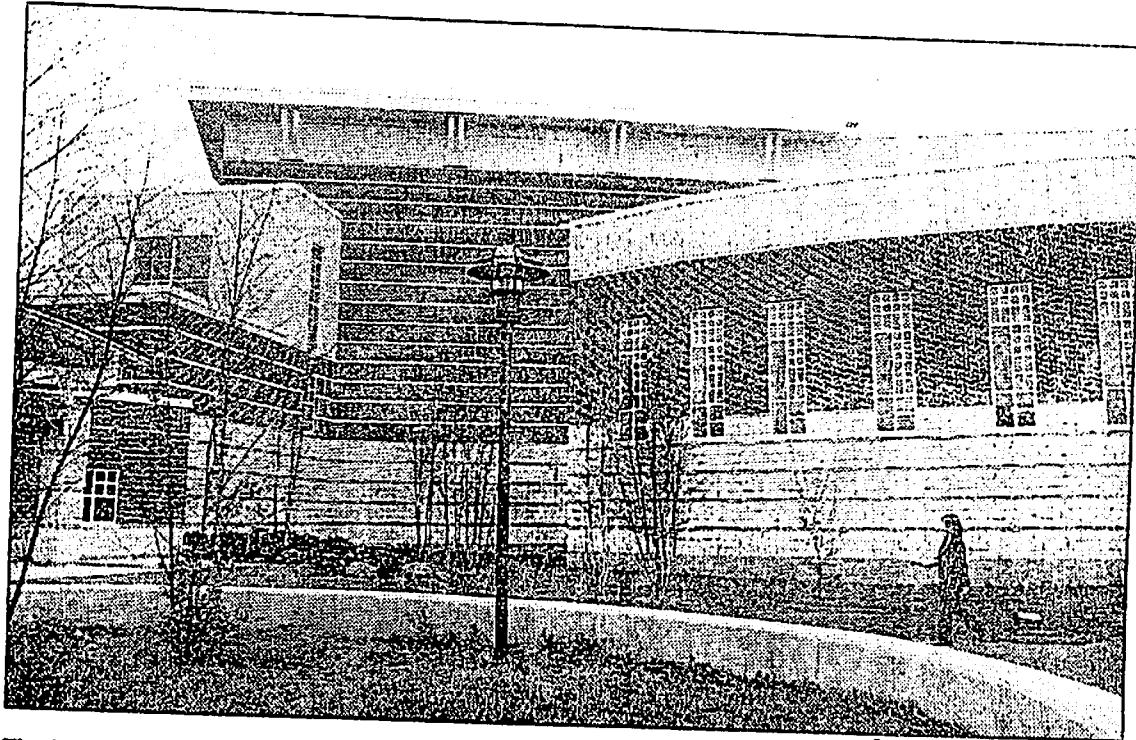
The outside shows provide more than an opportunity to raise money and show off the facility, they offer additional education opportunities for students.

Drama adviser Darren MacFarlane deemed the Beatlemania show a success not only because of the good turnout and what he described as a high-quality performance, but also because it gave students a chance to work behind the scenes.

They helped run the lighting and got a taste of loading and unloading equipment for a large production.

The center is exciting for performers and, MacFarlane said, a "great asset" for kids who want to pursue production work beyond their school years.

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The Duxbury Performing Arts Center on Alden Street opened in June.

GREG DEAR/The Patriot Ledger